

## BLM & Montana FWP Move Bighorns

*Craig Flentie*

*Public Affairs Officer*

*Central Montana District*

By any measure, it was an unusual day for 46 bighorn sheep residing on BLM-managed public land near the Missouri River north of Winifred, Mont.

This particular late-winter morning dawned gray and cold with a thin blanket of fresh snow. Prompted by their need-to-feed, the bighorns stirred early and moved from their bedding areas in the steep coulees common to the Missouri Breaks. They zigzagged their way to the snow covered benches where they would browse on the variety of grasses and forbs that still held a little late winter nutrition.

That's where the routine nature of their day ended.

Suddenly, a helicopter broke from the cloud cover to the west and held its position over the bighorns as they ran toward the inherent safety of the steep draws.

In what had to be a quick (but puzzling) series of events, some sheep were netted, blindfolded, hobbled, bagged, flown to a transfer site, held on straw bales, poked, probed, swabbed, vaccinated, and placed in a horse trailer.

Later that day, when the trailer door next opened, they bolted into their new habitat on the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area near Helena, somewhat ruffled but much better off for the experience.

By the day's end the BLM's Lewistown Field Office and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) had completed a flawless bighorn sheep capture, transfer and release.

The goal of the cooperative effort was to move approximately 50 sheep (mostly ewes and lambs) from public land deep in the Missouri Breaks north of Winifred, to other key locations selected by the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The BLM and MFWP used a contract helicopter with a professional netting crew to net the sheep. Throughout

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The contract helicopter gently lowers three bighorn sheep to the transfer site for a physical assessment before they are transported from the Missouri River Breaks north of Winifred, to the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area north of Helena. *Photo by Matt Comer*

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# Kate Kitchell is New Associate State Director

Kate Kitchell is the new associate state director of the Montana/Dakotas BLM. She replaces Howard Lemm, who retired in July 2010.

Kitchell began her federal career in 1975 with the National Park Service and joined the BLM in 1989 in Colorado. She's held BLM management positions in Colorado, Utah, and Idaho in field and state offices. In 2005, she moved to the U.S. Geological Survey where she was most recently director of the Southwest Biological Science Center in Flagstaff. Kitchell has natural resources degrees from the University of New Hampshire (B.S.) and Utah State University (M.S.).

Throughout her career, Kitchell has carried a passion for integrating science into resource management and building partnerships for public land use and stewardship.

"I'm very passionate about applying science to multiple use management, but the practical application of science in the real world is very difficult," she said. "That's why it is so important to develop relationships, both internally and externally, and maintain ongoing communication."

Kitchell looks forward to working with Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, which bring together these two objectives. LCCs are management-science partnerships that involve federal, state, and tribal agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Their goal is to address climate change and other stressors within and across landscapes using science-based, integrated resource management actions. The Montana/Dakotas BLM is involved in two: the Great Northern LCC and the Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC.

Kitchell is also excited about working with communities and land users to further the BLM's Sound Investment for America and promote public use and enjoyment of BLM's resources. A relatively small agency, the BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public lands nationwide (8.3 million in Montana and the Dakotas), striving to balance economic benefits with natural resource conservation. BLM-managed activities on public lands support jobs, provide recreational opportunities, and produce energy, timber products, and grazing-related benefits. In fact, the agency raises more money each year for the American taxpayer than it spends.



Montana/Dakotas BLM Associate  
State Director Kate Kitchell

"I'm excited about the wonderful outdoor recreation opportunities we have to offer – such as the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and the Madison River," said Kitchell.

Another effort recently launched by the Montana/Dakotas BLM – the Environmental Management System – also fits well with Kitchell's interests. The EMS is a framework by which we identify and reduce the impacts from our activities, products, and services. That touches on virtually everything the BLM does -- from how we dispose of outdated electronics to oil and gas field inspections.

"It's important that we look for ways to incorporate environmental stewardship into our daily business," said Kitchell. "We already do that to some degree, but EMS will help us do even better."

Kitchell and her husband, Mike Eldred, enjoy a wide variety of outdoor activities. They both anticipate the many recreational opportunities here in Montana and the Dakotas.

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the day, the pilot and crew proved themselves extremely capable. The pilot would maneuver the copter over the running sheep until a gunner, shooting a hand-held net gun (a .308 rifle converted to shoot a folded net rather than a bullet) could get a clear shot at a selected animal or a group of sheep. The net gun casts a net that measures about 15 feet by 15 feet, and on several occasions, multiple sheep were caught with one shot.



Abel Guevara (a BLM wildlife biologist with the Lewistown Field Office) holds sheep #75 while other biologists gather blood samples and administer vitamins and antibiotics before the ewe is placed in a trailer for a ride to its new habitat in the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area. *Photo by Matt Comer*

After netting a bighorn, the helicopter would land and crew members would quickly hobble and blindfold each sheep. With those tasks completed, each sheep was then placed in a nylon transport bag, suspended below the copter with a long line and flown to a common transfer site. The helicopter could easily long line four or five sheep at a time.

At the transfer site, the helicopter would gently lower the sheep back to the ground, where biologists from MTFWP and BLM and other ground crew members would remove the bagged sheep from the long line. With the sheep still blindfolded and hobbled, blood samples and nose and throat swabs were taken and each sheep was given vitamins and antibiotics.

The ground crew would then move the sheep to MFWP trailers where the hobbles and blindfolds were removed and the sheep were ready for transport to their new habitats.

According to Matt Comer, a BLM wildlife biologist in Lewistown, "We had originally scheduled two days to complete the project, but at the end of the first day we had 46 sheep captured, sampled, vaccinated, loaded in trailers and on their way to other locations so we called the project completed."

It was a very efficient operation; the helicopter crew, biologists and other crew members worked quickly to minimize any undue stress on the sheep (whose health was closely monitored throughout the operation). The effort couldn't have been more successful, with 46 sheep quickly captured, transported and released with no injuries or mortalities.

This cooperative project was a win/win/win for the BLM, MFWP and Montana's sportsmen. There is room for additional sheep in other suitable habitats and the sheep herd in the Breaks is expanding to the point where mixing with domestic sheep is a greater concern.

"It is essential to avoid letting wild sheep mix with domestic sheep because of the near certainty of transmitting disease into the wild sheep. Bighorns are hardy animals and can withstand a lot of weather and habitat variations. However, they cannot survive the variety of diseases they pick up from domestic sheep (including respiratory disease, pneumonia, parasites and pink eye)," Comer added. On

numerous occasions, some of these diseases have proven fatal to entire herds of bighorns.

While the sheep hunting units in the Missouri Breaks have become the "units of choice" for sheep hunters (because of the trophy size attained by some of the rams), transporting this number of sheep out of the Breaks will not decrease hunting opportunities. The current sheep population in this area is above the unit goals set by MFWP, and hunting, combined with natural mortality, is not keeping up with the harvest needed to keep sheep numbers in line with their available habitat. Limited hunter/public access is the primary factor limiting sheep harvest in these units.

At the end of a long day, the trailer doors were opened and 46 bighorn sheep bound away to find themselves in great new habitat; still along the Missouri River, but now in the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area north of Helena, Mont.

# Excess Radios Go to Worden Fire Department

*Mary Apple  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Montana State Office*

The Montana/Dakotas BLM recently assisted the Worden Fire Department (WFD) with the acquisition of much-needed communication equipment. The BLM sold 33 portable radios, complete with accessories, to the Worden Fire Department for the bargain basement price of \$25 each.

Lance Taylor, chief of Worden Fire, worked with Alan Miller, BLM electronics technician, to lay the groundwork for the sale of the equipment. A chance conversation between BLM volunteer Tracy Livingston and Stuart Andersen (a Worden Fire volunteer) led to the contact between Taylor and Miller. Miller said it was the first major excess of radio equipment to local cooperators out of his radio shop. The BLM utilizes handheld and mobile radio equipment to communicate during wildland fires and in the course of normal business.

According to Taylor, "This deal has helped out the WFD more than words can say. We were in the Dark Ages when it came to communications. Some of our radios were



Lance Taylor, chief of the Worden Fire Department, holds one of the radios his department recently purchased from the BLM. He said the new radios will greatly improve communications among firefighters throughout the Huntley Project. *Photo by Tracy Livingston*

12 to 15 years old, and most were starting to break down and become more and more unreliable. We purchased our newest ones several years ago through a county-wide grant; they had become totally useless, to say the least. This purchase has saved us tens of thousands of dollars and will allow us to focus on other needs. We appreciate both Tracy Livingston's and the BLM's help with this opportunity, which will enhance the safety of the firefighters on the Huntley Project."

The radios not only provide much needed communications throughout the Huntley

Project, they will allow Worden Fire to meet the Federal Communications Commission narrowband mandate effective in 2012.

The BLM has the authority to surplus its used equipment by selling to local fire departments at a fraction of the purchase cost. The BLM then puts the sales proceeds toward the cost of replacements. The entire transaction is a win/win for both federal and local governments. Local departments interested in this property program should contact Alan Miller at 406-896-5275 for more information.

# America's Great Outdoors - *right here in our own backyard*

Mary Apple  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Montana State Office

Gas prices are rising, the kids are already bored with their summer "staycation," it's hot or it's raining, the lawn needs mowing---YOU NEED A VACATION!

But, gas is nearing four bucks a gallon, and weekends only last two days. Not to worry. There's plenty to do in Montana and the Dakotas on the public lands nearest you.

Visit the Missouri River Breaks Interpretive Center in Fort Benton (Montana's oldest city). The center is celebrating its fifth year already and there are some special programs planned.

Attend Clark Days (July 23 and 24) at Pompeys Pillar National Monument east of Billings.

Admission is free and you can camp overnight (the one night a year you can camp at the Pillar).

Take a hike (in a good way). Try Humbug Spires, Terry Badlands, or Weatherman Draw.



History buffs can check out this historic cavalry barn at Ft. Meade. *BLM Photo*



Mathews Recreation Area near Miles City. *BLM Photo*

The kids are free every day at Garnet Ghost Town and everyone is free on June 21. But really, the regular rate of \$3 is quite a bargain. The ghost town was just added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Bird watchers—we have some places for you. Try Howrey Island Recreation Area located along the Yellowstone River, six miles southwest of Hysham.

Don't even get me started on fishing opportunities: Holter, Hauser, Madison, Missouri, Yellowstone, Troika (the only public restroom for miles), rivers, lakes, reservoirs, trout, crappie, bass, sunburns, flies (the kind you tie and the kind that bite). We've got it all!

Campers—have you been to Schnell, Ft. Meade, Matthews, or Axolotl Lakes? We even have a rental cabin at the latter that sleeps seven people. The views from there? Spectacular doesn't begin to describe them.

What haven't I mentioned yet? Boating, waterskiing, rock climbing, OHV riding (although gas is nearing four bucks a gallon), exploring, picnicking, horseback riding, napping, getting away from it all even if it's just for an afternoon. Just watch out for the dinosaurs.

Need more info—maybe a map? Visit <http://www.mt.blm.gov> or your local BLM office. It's just that easy. See you in the fall!



Fly fishing on the Big Hole River. *BLM Photo*

# Cows Rescue Rare Plants in Southwestern Montana

*Ryan Martin*

*Rangeland Management Specialist  
Dillon Field Office*

“Hammer it, take it to the dirt and make it look like a golf course.” That’s what I told J Bar L Ranch Manager Bryan Urling in the spring of 2009. The two of us were discussing livestock management for the 780-acre BLM Sand Dunes grazing allotment in the beautiful Centennial Valley. Bryan looked a little stunned as he scratched his head and assured me he would do his best. This was uncharted territory for him, coming from a ranch that prides itself on healthy rangelands and sound livestock management practices.

Livestock management is the second important aspect of a management plan that focuses on restoring critical habitat for rare plants including painted milk vetch (*Astragalus ceramicus*), pale evening-primrose (*Oenothera pallida*), sand wild rye (*Cryptantha fendleri*), and fendler cat’s-eye (*Leymus flavescens*).

In the September 2008 issue of *Noteworthy News*, we read about how changes in disturbance regimes—primarily fire suppression and reduced herbivore grazing—have allowed sagebrush and bunchgrasses to overtake much of the Centennial Valley Sand Hills, which has stabilized the sand dunes. In most cases in Montana, we would call the overabundance of perennial bunchgrasses and sagebrush a “Proper Functioning Upland.” However, rare plant populations depend on early successional, open sand habitat for survival, according to Dillon Field Office Rare Plant Coordinator Kelly Urresti. For rare plants to remain in existence in the Centennial Valley, Urresti says we need to destabilize sand dune habitat by reducing perennial bunchgrass and sagebrush and give rare plants a competitive advantage for establishment and growth.

In the Centennial Sandhills Area of Critical Environmental Concern, a prescribed burn in 2008 was the first step in implementing special management. Livestock grazing was the second step. We hoped that after the 2008 prescribed burn, cattle grazing in electrified fence paddocks (guided by strategically placed mineral) could destabilize sand dune habitat where rare plants need to survive.

On the J Bar L Ranch, Urling attempted to graze the allotment shortly after the September 2008 burn to destabilize the sand dunes. However, the long distance livestock had to travel to water made the cattle’s impact less than desired.



September 2008, Sand dunes BLM Allotment after prescribed fire. *BLM photo*



September 2010: Solar-powered well, troughs, electric fence, and sand dune habitat. *BLM photo*

During the winter of 2009, J Bar L Ranch, The Nature Conservancy and the BLM discussed options to increase the grazing impact in core rare plant areas. We cooperatively decided to drill a solar-powered well and provide troughs in the central portion of the allotment. This water, along with mobile electric fences, would give the permittee the tools needed to increase the stocking rate on the dunes, while maintaining a healthy rangeland on the remainder of the allotment.

In the spring of 2010, a well was drilled and a solar-powered pump and troughs were installed. By that autumn, the water system was tested and performed well. The collaborative project was a success!

Future grazing management will focus on providing rare plant habitat on the dunes while maintaining a healthy rangeland on the remainder of the allotment. This project is a prime example of unique groups—The Nature Conservancy, the BLM grazing permittee, and the BLM—working together for the common goal of restoring rare plants and their habitat.

# Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center Celebrates 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

*Special events planned throughout the summer*

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center, at 701 7<sup>th</sup> Street in Fort Benton, will host a series of events this summer in commemoration of its fifth year of operation.

## **May 28 through August 13:**

Special photo exhibit featuring unique places in Montana and throughout the West, including the Upper Missouri River Breaks

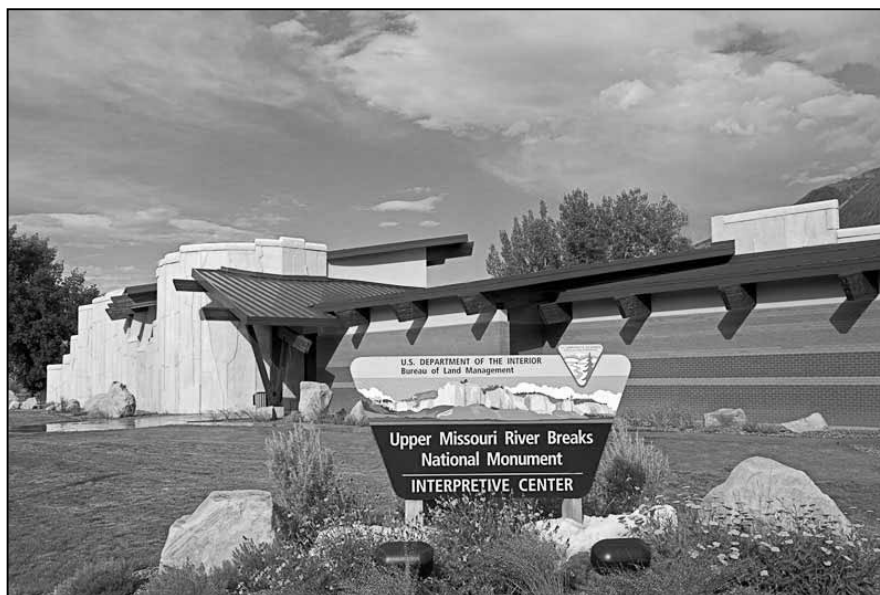
## **June 25: Fort Benton's Summer Celebration**

9:30 a.m., Award-winning Montana author Dorothy Patent will present a special children's program about native wildlife. Special activities and a walk along the river trail will be included.

1 p.m.: Montana musician and storyteller Jack Gladstone will perform. Gladstone, a member of the Blackfeet tribe, relates tales from the tribe as well as pieces of Fort Benton history.

4 p.m.: Dorothy Patent will conduct a native plant and wildlife presentation geared toward adults, teachers and writers. At 5 p.m. her husband, Greg, a noted cookbook author, will give a presentation on homestead cooking.

**June 26, 11 a.m.:** Jim Evans, Executive Director of the Nez Perce Trail Foundation, will talk about the Nez Perce National Historic Trail. In 1877, the Nez Perce, under the guidance of Chief Joseph, traveled through the Missouri River Breaks area as they attempted to flee to Canada with the American Army in pursuit.



The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center is hosting a series of events this summer to mark its 5th anniversary. *BLM photo*

**August 6--Family Day:** Great Falls resident and Audubon member Arla Erkert will teach about birds and butterflies through children's activities and a walk along the river trail. Additionally, a special water exhibit will focus on Montana's watersheds. Other special family-oriented events are planned throughout the day as well.

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center opened its doors in 2006. The Center's on-site exhibits highlight the area's natural and cultural history, helping visitors experience the region's many cultural stories, from Native Americans and explorers to trappers and steamboat captains. Displays of native wildlife, including mammals, prehistoric fish, and indigenous songbirds, also highlight

a visitor's experience. Center guests can step into a reproduction of a steamboat pilothouse, view and touch wildlife displays, and enjoy the magnificent Missouri River from the steamboat-shaped patio. A lovely, short riverside trail allows visitors an easy, delightful walk near the Mighty Mo, for relaxing and wildlife watching. An on-site bookstore is available as well. The BLM, in partnership with the Fort Benton River and Plains Society, operates the Interpretive Center.

For more information on the Center's summer anniversary activities or general information, visit the facility's website: [http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown\\_field\\_office/umrbnm/interpcenter.html](http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown_field_office/umrbnm/interpcenter.html) or call 406-622-4000.

## Attention BLM Retirees

### The BLM Retirees Association

Stay in touch! The BLM Retirees Association has a social gathering at 11:30 a.m. on the first Tuesday of even-numbered months at the Windmill (3429 TransTech Way) in Billings. If you would like to receive email or postcard notifications of these meetings, please contact Alice Slagowski at 406-259-9319 or [asluggo@bresnan.net](mailto:asluggo@bresnan.net).

### The Public Lands Foundation

The Public Lands Foundation (PLF) offers new retirees a free one-year membership. If you're interested, contact David Mari, Montana PLF Representative, at 406-538-7121, or email [dmari@earthlink.net](mailto:dmari@earthlink.net) (please note "PLF" on the subject line).

What is the PLF? It works to keep America's public lands in public hands, managed professionally and sustainably for responsible common use and enjoyment.

The goals of the PLF are to:

- Keep lands managed by the BLM in public ownership and open to use by the public.
- Support multiple use management under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
- Encourage professionalism by BLM employees.
- Increase the public's understanding of and support for the proper management of the public lands.

Although PLF membership consists largely of retired

BLMers, current employees and anyone interested in the goals of the organization are welcome to join.

#### Retired since March 1, 2011:

William Frank -- 31 years  
Field Manager  
Lewistown Field Office

Phillip Gill -- 28 years  
Fire Management Officer  
Montana State Office

William McManus -- 25 years  
Supvy. Petroleum Engineering Tech.  
North Dakota Field Office

Steven Schey -- 34 years  
Supvy. Land Surveyor  
Montana State Office

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